

VZCZCXYZ0006
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHGT #0465/01 1062157
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 152157Z APR 08
FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5153

UNCLAS GUATEMALA 000465

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR PM/DTCC- BLUE LANTERN COORDINATOR

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ETTC](#) [KMOG](#) [GT](#)

SUBJECT: GUATEMALA: BLUE LANTERN 050062674 AND 050095703

REF: STATE 35779

¶1. Summary: On April 11, Poloff accompanied PM/DTCC Officers Judd Stitzel and Kyle Ballard on the post-shipment end-use check of STI Guatemala per Reftel A. Officers toured the STI Office and met with STI owner Estuardo Gomez. STI has yet to receive the 100 .22 caliber handguns authorized under export license 050062674 and 050095703, but Gomez stated that the weapons were in Miami awaiting confirmation of export license 050095703. STI appears to be a legitimate arms import company that sells high-end handguns mainly to students of Mr. Gomez's primary business, which is offering handgun safety and training classes. STI appears to follow all local regulations and Post has no derogatory information that would prejudice future import license requests. End Summary.

¶2. On April 11, Poloff accompanied PM/DTCC Officers Judd Stitzel and Kyle Ballard on the post-shipment end-use check of STI Guatemala per Reftel A. The STI Office at 17 Avenida 28-73, Zone 11, Guatemala City, is located on in a residential neighborhood. STI owner Estuardo Gomez was open and frank regarding the details of his business, and showed officers his records and facility without hesitation. Gomez claimed that he originally filed license request 050062674 to import 100 .22 caliber handguns to sell to students of his self defense/gun safety school. He added that this license expired prior to delivery of the weapons, which forced him to file license request 055095703. He claims that the weapons are still waiting in Miami for shipment, and he was unaware that license 055095703 had been approved. He also pointed out that he had filed several other import requests for .40 caliber and 9mm handguns to which he was awaiting response, although he acknowledged that such requests were not often approved by U.S. authorities. He said that once the 100 handguns arrived in country it would take at least one-month for them to clear customs and DECAM (Guatemala's agency responsible for arms control). He added that he already had buyers for many of the guns and expected to sell all 100 handguns in under two months.

¶3. Mr. Gomez stated that his primary business is providing gun safety and marksmanship classes, which he says grew out of his long career competing in international shooting competitions. He claims to be one of the top-five shooters in the International Practical Shooting Confederation (IPSC), and that he travels to the U.S. every year for competitions. The walls of his office boast a large number of plaques and trophies from around the world supporting his claims to being a well-known marksman, which he says helps him attract students. The tour of the STI office included the small but secure walk-in gun locker that had survived a recent burglary attempt, and office space that will be converted into a gun sales outlet if the company can increase the number of weapons imported from the U.S.

¶4. Gomez claimed, and his DECAM-certified records corroborated, that he specializes in selling high-end handguns. He said that "my customers wear Rolexes and drive BMWs, they can afford the best and don't mind paying for it."

He stated that over half of the weapons in Guatemala were not imported legally or registered with DECAM, and added that the vast majority of gun crime did not link back to weapons legally imported. He argued that U.S. restrictions on gun importation hurt legitimate businessmen, but did nothing to reduce the number of guns on Guatemalan streets. He added that countries like Turkey and Israel supplied large numbers of cheap handguns to Guatemala, and that it was these guns as opposed to expensive U.S. handguns that ended up being used in crimes.

¶5. Gomez stated that the majority of his customers purchased handguns for self protection, and that while as part of his training course he recommends small .22 caliber handguns, many of his clients preferred large (and shiny) .40 caliber handguns. He also pointed out that IPSC and other international shooting organizations use .40 caliber handguns in competition. To meet the needs of his customers and supply handguns for competitions he claims to have submitted several export applications for .40 caliber handguns that have routinely been turned down. He pointed out that a .40 caliber STI Edge handgun could be purchased for upwards of \$5,000 on the black market and subsequently registered (made legal) with DECAM. He believes he could buy the same gun for \$1,250 in the U.S., pay \$200 in shipping and transport costs, and sell it for upwards of \$2,500, making a good profit while reducing the black market gun trade in Guatemala.

¶6. Comment: Gomez's small handgun sales business seems to be a legitimate offshoot of his main business activity and Post has no derogatory information about STI Guatemala. Post would not oppose future sales of .22 caliber handguns to STI Guatemala, but would recommend against sales larger than 100 units until STI Guatemala adds an additional gun safe inside the company's walk-in gun locker to accommodate the weapons. End Comment.

¶7. This message was cleared by PM/DTCC K. Ballard prior to transmission.

Derham